

to figure out what the problem is before we can get to what we need to do.

People say, well, we have raised taxes; we just need more revenue. Spending, as measured as a percentage of the economy, 4 years ago we were spending 20 percent of our GDP. We are now spending 25 percent of our GDP. When we say on our side that it is a spending problem, it absolutely is, it absolutely is, and it is out of control.

Guess what. Most of it is called mandatory spending. That means entitlements. We can't do anything about it. They are now taken off the table.

Now, about a year ago, you may remember there was this big debate, the Budget Control Act. There was a big debate over raising the debt ceiling, and they attached to it some slowdown in spending. Now, these were not cuts; the sequester is not a cut in spending. It is repeated all the time on TV that the sequester is a cut, but it is not a cut; it is a slowdown in the rate of growth. But it is at least going in the right direction.

So what is the one thing we hear now that is going to be part of this deal? We are going to get rid of the sequester. So the one even pretend, make-believe attempt to try to slow down spending, they are going to jettison it. They are going to kick the can down the road—but we are going to get those rich people. We are going to attack those rich people.

We have to wake up soon as a country. We are literally insolvent. Some say, well, we are a great and powerful country. Bad things could never happen to us. It can, and it has happened to great civilized countries. Do you know what they do. Great and civilized countries can destroy their currency. We have printed trillions upon trillions of dollars, and we are in danger of destroying the very value of our currency.

So instead of having a President who runs around saying he is going to stick it to rich people, what we really need are honest people to go around the country and say to people: If you are working class or you are retired, the government is stealing from you. The government is stealing your savings through big government. On the one hand, they offer you something. They offer you baubles. They offer you something for free: Here is a cell phone. Just take the cell phone and vote for me. It will be OK.

The problem is, it is not free. On the one hand, you get the free cell phone. On the other hand, you get \$4 gas. On the other hand, you get food costs rising.

Why do prices go up? Because we run a deficit giving you free stuff, and then we print money to pay for it, and that steals value from what you have. It is not that gas is more precious; gas is rising because the value of the dollar is shrinking. Food is rising because the value of the dollar is shrinking.

So big government isn't your friend, and deficits are not your friend. We

hang in the balance up here and nobody is serious about it.

What is the one thing that has been taken off the table? Spending. We will not cut any spending. So we are looking for a deal that will raise taxes, which everybody seems to equate with drowning—except we are only going to make a few people drown, and they are rich anyway. But I think drowning is a policy. Drowning, even if it is selective drowning, being in favor of selective drowning is not a good policy.

What I have said and what I tell people is let your representatives know. Let your Senators know that you would rather have some kind of serious fix to the problem rather than kicking the can down the road; that you would rather have them actually do something that would allow the economy to grow, would allow jobs to be created, and, as a consequence, government would bring in more revenue.

The only thing proven to ever bring in more revenue is economic growth. What is going on right now? We are growing at a little under 2 percent. When the President, 2 years ago, extended all the tax rates and chose not to raise tax rates, we were growing faster. He said we don't want to rock the economy, and he agreed to extend all tax breaks. But now I think he is hell bent on raising taxes.

Realize that what you are going to get is raising taxes, more money taken out of the private sector and given to the government, the inefficient sector. Don't count on that new money coming in going to make the debt smaller; count on it funding more programs.

You will notice, if you look carefully at whatever this fiscal cliff deal is, there will not be spending cuts, but there will be spending proposals. So we are going to try to tax rich people more and get more money. It may not work because often you raise rates and get less revenue. We are going to try that, but we take the money that we get from rich people, and we are going to immediately spend it on more foolhardy programs, which is what we have been doing up here. We are not going to fix the problem, we are going to perpetuate the problem.

What I would argue for is we should be doing the opposite. We, the Republican Party, the party of limited government and low taxation, should have no part in this. We should have no fingerprints on this, and we should in no way support anything that raises taxes because it is bad economic policy.

So I, for one, will not support any proposal that comes out that does not cut spending and raises taxes.

Mr. President, I yield the remainder of my time, and I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BEGICH). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the period for morning business for debate only be extended until 2 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, the hour is nigh. Now Washington is awash in the rumor that there might be some progress being made. I hope so. If there was anything that was made clear to this Senator in the reelection in one of the biggest States in the Union, it was that the people want us to come together and to stop this bickering, the excessive ideological rigidity, and the excessive partisanship. That is a huge turnoff because ideological rigidity and excessive partisanship are impediments to getting people to come together with commonsense decisions for solutions.

Obviously, there is an easy way. Hopefully that is what is being tweaked at the moment in a final solution, with the President to speak in about 30 minutes. I hope so.

Mr. President, I am going to leave you with this thought. My colleagues know that a little over a quarter century ago, I had the privilege of seeing our home planet from the perspective of looking through the window of a spacecraft. It was the 24th flight of the space shuttle. It was early in the space shuttle program. It is indelibly etched in my mind's eye, as I looked back at Earth, what I saw. I did not see political divisions. I did not see religious divisions. I did not see ethnic divisions. What I saw is that we were all in this together, all a part of planet Earth. If we could remember that in our politics, we would all get along so much better. I hope that stays indelibly etched in my mind's eye and that we ultimately prevail in this momentous decision of avoiding the fiscal cliff.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HAGAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. HUTCHISON. Madam President, there is a lot of buzzing going on around the Capitol today. Here we are on New Year's Eve, and so many of us had hoped we would have an agreement that would be really a big agreement, a long-term agreement that we would have liked to have had finished maybe by September, certainly by October, but that was not to be. In fact, as we saw in the elections of this year, our country is divided and our House here is divided as well. So it has been hard to come to terms.

It has been said that democracy is the worst form of government, except for all the rest, because when we have opinions, when we have free speech, when we have elections that put a Democratic majority in the Senate and a Republican majority in the House, we know there is not going to be a clear and precise path. But in the end, it is the best because we have all expressed our opinions and everyone has been heard.

We have had countless meetings in the last few weeks trying to see where people could give and where they couldn't. I have said from the beginning that I am optimistic because I think our democracy will work in the end. From what I am hearing from the different leaders, we are close to an agreement. We are not there, but it is a starting point and certainly a point at which there is already some agreement.

It may not seem as though it should be so hard, but once we do have the framework of an agreement, there are a lot of decisions that have to be made. We have to talk among Senate Democrats and Republicans, and then we have to go to the House and talk to Republicans and Democrats. I think one thing that is clear is there has to be a substantial number of votes on both sides of the aisle and both sides of the Rotunda. We will not pass something with all Democratic votes or all Republican votes because it will not pass in the other House. So I think there is a lot of refining of what is a pretty good agreement in the making, but the refining has not yet been finished. I have abiding hope that we will get there.

TIME TO REFLECT

Since this may possibly be my last day as a U.S. Senator—at least my last time to vote. Up until January 2, I am a U.S. Senator, but actually being able to participate at this late date has given me some time to reflect. I so appreciate some of the major communications and opportunities I have had with the real people in my home State of Texas and beyond. I always think of the many times I have been able to meet with our troops in harm's way.

In the early years of my tenure in the Senate, our troops were in harm's way in Bosnia, where there were many conflicts, and I got to visit with them and see what their concerns were and what was on their minds, and then into

Iraq and then into Afghanistan. I have visited all of these places and had the chance to talk to our troops. What a person comes away with when they have that opportunity is the understanding that America is in good hands with our younger generation. They have such a great spirit.

I went to the Brooke Army Medical Center Hospital in San Antonio and visited with a young man who had lost both legs in an IED explosion. He had been able to get used to that situation for maybe 2 weeks. So it is reasonable to say he had had the shock of his life. So I went into his room, and there is his wife and his little daughter, who was about the same age as my daughter, sitting there with him.

He says to me: Senator, they won't let me go back, and that is where I want to be.

Then his darling wife pipes up and says: You know what, they took half of you and they are not getting the other half.

Now, if that isn't a story, for both of them to have such a spirit. I was so touched by that.

Just in the last month or so, I was back in San Antonio visiting the wonderful Center for the Intrepid they have for the wounded warriors and their families. It is a recreation center, and it is a place where they can go and cook food and have family meetings. They can play games, and they have extensive learning opportunities with computer rooms. It is a wonderful center they have put together, the people of San Antonio.

This was all spearheaded by a wounded warrior who had been cooped up in a room and wanted to have some ability to get outside the room with his family and have some experiences even though he was still going through treatment. He started raising money, and he raised it from the community and from many other wounded warriors, as well as military personnel, but a lot of the citizens of San Antonio and Texas stepped forward. So this is a wonderful place.

I met a wonderful young man who lost his arm and parts of two of his legs. He was a West Point graduate. He was sitting there, again with his beautiful wife, and I was visiting with him.

He said: I just want to be able to continue to contribute.

And I thought, oh my goodness, here is a West Point graduate who has so much to give and who wants to continue to give. So I came back and I wrote a letter to General Odierno, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and I told him about the young man who lost most of three limbs out of four and who wants to keep contributing. What about making him a military fellow, as we have in our offices, as the Presiding Officer knows? We have military fellows who are Active-Duty military, and they help us. We can have one a year. They help us by providing the military perspective on the things we are doing. Of course, because I have

served on the Defense Subcommittee and the Military Construction Subcommittee of Appropriations and the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I love to have those military fellows.

I was so pleased that within just a month or so, when the choices were made for military fellows, this young man was chosen by the Army with the support of General Odierno, whose own son also has lost an arm in combat.

So I think that is a wonderful thing and that on reflection is one of the highlights of my moments to remember.

I also remember some of the great things my staff has done. I have to say, my staff has been the can-do staff of all time. They never take no for an answer. So when we have challenges, individuals who need help—it may be a veterans' benefit; it may be a Social Security problem—they have always had the reputation as the staff who tries to do everything possible to come through.

I am very pleased the Senator who is going to take my place on January 3 is going to have my staff director for case work, Joyce Sibley—who has had such a great reputation—continue in that position. She knows the issues. She knows the people. She will be great. I applaud Senator-elect TED CRUZ for making that decision and for keeping most of the staff who have done this wonderful work.

But let me give a couple examples. First of all, we got a frantic call from a friend of mine about a doctor who was trapped on top of Mount Everest. He was a Dallas doctor, and he was trapped up there in a blizzard and not expected to live. They had a terrible loss of some of the people in their climbing group, and a friend called and said: Is there anything you can do?

My wonderful staff, one of whom is retired military and knows so many of the things that could be done, Dave Davis, and Carolyn Kobey, who handles this casework in my Dallas office. Carolyn actually got in touch with the Nepalese Armed Forces and as a result of Carolyn's efforts, they were able to get a helicopter up. Once you get past a certain level—13,000 feet—you have to have oxygen in a helicopter or, obviously, if you are climbing.

So it was something that was a real ask of the Nepalese Air Force and we were able to get them to take that risk and to go up and they were able to rescue Dr. Beck Weathers. He is alive and wrote a great book about that experience from his vantage point. But we were very pleased to be able to take part in something such as that.

I will tell you, maybe the all time great experience was in my Houston office, led by Jason Fuller. We got a call in the Dallas office, and so the Houston and Dallas offices together did this. We got a call in the Dallas office from a woman in Mississippi. She said: I didn't know who else to call, but I knew Senator HUTCHISON's name. My son is having an asthma attack in Houston, and

I don't know how to get him the help he needs. He is in his apartment by himself.

My staff said: Please give us the information. We will call our Houston office, and we will see if we can get help, which they did. They called the Houston office. The Houston office called 9-1-1. They went out to the young man's apartment. He was, in fact, in a dire circumstance and would have died had he not gotten help right away. But they took him in. They gave him the help he needed, and that young man is alive today.

So these instances are some of the great memories I will have of having a wonderful staff who will go the extra mile and try to help the individuals in our State as well as on the big issues where we also try to make sure we do everything we can to get something that is very important to us, whether it is to America or to Texas or to Texans or to Americans.

These are some of the memories I will take with me as I leave this great body. As I said in my actual formal farewell speech, it is easy to be critical. I saw on television this morning that the esteem of Congress has fallen to 5 percent favorable. I am not surprised at that. As my colleague JOHN MCCAIN once said: Now we are down to blood relatives and paid staff. It is easy to criticize, and there are a lot of reasons to criticize. I will admit things have not been as productive and most certainly the acrimony does show sometimes.

But I am going to say, as I leave, after almost 20 years in this body, the people here are all dedicated. There is not one who is not a dedicated patriotic American. We disagree, sometimes violently disagree, on the way we should get to our goals. But our agreement is on the goal of keeping America the beacon of freedom to the world, to keeping our military strong, to doing right by all our people, whether it is a small businessperson who is creating jobs who is trying to go up the ladder of success or whether it is someone who is in trouble because they have had a huge setback in their lives. Everyone here wants America to continue to be the magnet for the world. We want to be the science and technology innovators who will continue to fuel our economy. It is just how we get there that causes the disagreement.

We have patriotic people who have been elected. I hope for the next 2 years we will put aside the partisan politics, put aside the thoughts of future elections, and try to solve the big issues of our time, because there is a lot of intelligence in this body. There is a lot of ability to come together. I keep the abiding faith that our messy democracy will, in fact, prevail because I cannot think of going to anything else. As long as we can function and show the world we can govern, as we disagree, that will be the example that will forever make our country the best and, hopefully, be a model for others to not

think you have to take to the streets, not think you need guns to have the government you want but to show that peaceful transition can be done and also that we can have a lot of discussion, a lot of disagreements, but we can do it civilly.

I leave this body knowing if we just remember the honor we have of growing up in the greatest Nation on Earth, we will recognize that it is our responsibility to give the same to our children and grandchildren. It is the least we can do.

Thank you. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the period for morning business for debate only be extended until 3 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BROWN of Ohio. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORKER. Madam President, I just listened to the President, and my heart is still pounding. I was very disappointed to hear what the President just had to say in front of a pep rally—something very unbecoming of where we are at this moment.

It is my understanding that most of the tax issues have been worked out—should have been worked out on the floor in regular order. I think most of the Senate is very distressed that we are in a situation where the negotiations are taking place all of this time and it is not being done through regular order, but that is the way things are today in the Senate.

But I just heard the President say that in dealing with the sequester that was put in place to reduce spending—it was part of a \$2.1 trillion package to reduce spending so that we could raise the debt ceiling back in August of 2011. No one ever thought we would end up in this place where the sequester would be enacted, but it was done so that we would reduce spending.

I notice my friend from Arizona is here. He has been one of the best there is to focus on defense spending and how

it should be done, and I know he would like to see things happen in a very different way in that regard.

But I just heard the President say that the way we are going to deal with this sequester is in a balanced way, through revenues and through reduced spending. I just want to go on record here on the Senate floor—I know there are negotiations that are taking place, but the sequester was to be dealt with and substituted with other spending reductions, not through revenues. I hope all those who are involved in bringing this together understand that even on the Democratic side, that was the understanding. Not only was it to be dealt with through spending reductions if these were considered to be ham-handed—and they are, and we should deal with them in a different way—but they were to be dealt with in the same time period. In other words, we weren't going to reduce \$100 billion of the sequester and pay for it over 10 years; it was to be done during the same amount of time.

So I know the President has fun heckling Congress. I think he lost probably numbers of votes with what he did. He didn't lose mine; I am not that way; I am going to look at the substance. But it is unfortunate that he doesn't spend as much time working on solving problems as he does on campaigns and pep rallies.

But I just want to say that I am very disappointed in what the President had to say, and I am one Senator. I just want to go on record that it is absolutely unacceptable to pay for the sequester with revenues.

Yesterday we had a meeting that broke down because all the money was being spent. The President campaigned for a year on raising taxes on the upper income. We have acquiesced to that. We know it is going to happen. But yesterday the deal was that all the money was going to be spent. There was going to be no deficit reduction. It is unbelievable—unbelievable that all of the money was going to be out the door as soon as it came in. As a matter of fact, before it came in, it was going to be spent.

I just want to say that I know the President enjoys heckling and having pep rallies to try to get Congress to act instead of sitting down and actually negotiating, but I hope that is what is going to happen, is we will end up following through on the reductions in spending that need to take place to replace the sequester.

I will also add just for what it is worth that the last time we extended unemployment insurance, we paid for it. The last time we did not cause the doc fix, the SGR, to go into place, we paid for it. And I hope that as this negotiation goes forward, we keep the same principles in place that we have had.

This country is over \$16 trillion in debt. The sequester was put in place because we couldn't reach an agreement on reductions, but we knew they